Construction of Social Distrust and Misconceptions: The Effects of Reality Crime Shows

A Synopsis

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Introduction

Television is an incredible invention in mass media which combines the audio and moving pictures. After the privatization of television, it changes the lifestyle of its audience. It becomes the tutor, reporter, entertainer, leader for its audience. Its role is not limited to only these categories because it keeps on changing with the new developments in television industry. Today we can find everything on TV whether it is news, education, entertainment channels or games, cartoon, movies etc. Its popularity can be identifying that it gains an identity of a household member. Popularity of Television inspired researchers of different disciplines such as mass communication students, sociologists and psychologist, criminologist etc. to study the television and its impact on audience in context to social construction, perception, opinion, and behavioural patterns (Gerbner 1976, Bandura 1986, Hearold 1986, etc.).

Television has many genres e.g. Entertainment, Crime, Family Drama, News, Sports, Cartoon, Educational etc. which fulfil the gratifications of viewers. From the late 1990's a new genre of TV has emerged is often called as reality TV.

Reality TV

When the reality TV shows has started?

This is a debatable question among the researchers of media studies. The researchers agreed on the point that reality television is developed between the factual information and entertainment scripts in original settings with cheap capital involvement. The early reality television researches of communication studies, do not involve the re-enactment, and scripted shows in the category of reality shows. The development of techniques and globalization era makes easier to produce more shows in cheap cost. Marketization begins from America and these reality shows are seems like another means of marketization policy because of their cheap production and maximum popularity. Slowly reality TV developed within historically and culturally specific media environments in developed countries (UK, USA, Russia etc.).

According to Hill (2005) -There are three main strands to the development of popular factual television, and these relate to three distinct and overlapping areas of media production as tabloid journalism in America, documentary television in UK, and popular entertainment\ infotainment in America. These three components made popular reality television shows like: Big Brother, Who wants to be a billionaire, American Ideal, Crime Watch, etc. These shows are considered to be real and their popularity sets a new trend which breaks the records of fictional programs.

Reality Crime Show-

The reality crime programs started as US phenomenon but latterly it spread in all over the world (Fishman and Cavendor 1998). The popularity of real crime shows is a very interesting topic in all over the world and many studies has proved many aspects and reasons behind their popularity by researchers of different disciplines such as Communication, Psychology, Sociology, and Criminology. Fishman and Cavendor (1998) noted that reality television crime shows flourished in a social context and crime policy, ideological notions about crime and television crimes shows are interrelated.

The Crimes shows based on real stories were started from Unsolved Mysteries later it became more popular with Crime Watch and America's Most Wanted. Real life stories become most profitable sector to invest in Globalization era by the producers of reality shows. They start giving franchises to other countries to make adaptations of such kind of programs. In India it starts with India's Most Wanted (1999) (IMW) an adaptation of America's Most Wanted. IMW Show gains very huge popularity at that time because of its sensational presentation of the real stories of crime.

Brief history of Indian Television-

Television is considered as a member of house and it is most effective medium in all kind of media. Television broadcasting was initiating during 1920's and become most important feature in developed countries during 1950's. Television came in India in 1959, and entertainment and information programmes were introduced from august 1965. After 1982 Indian television gets rapid extensions in network and starts telecast of very popular shows in

India with Hum Panch. During 1999 India's Most Wanted (IMW) crime busting fugitive hunter television initially launched on Zee TV and later on DD1, India's National broadcaster Doordarshan. This show is a clone of very popular American Show America's Most Wanted. America's Most Wanted was a reality show in a kind of popular tabloid journalism in local news launched on a Rupert Murdoch's channel Fox during 1980's.

In India IMW was gets popularity because of its unique style and new format for Indian audience. It was presented the stories in a sensationalized form which attracts the viewers. In 2003-2006 the reality crime show Crime Patrol's first season was started but it was not getting the audience attention. After four years Crime Patrol was again started with anchor AnupSoni and SakshiTanwar. It became popular in Indian audience and still running on high TRPs. In 2012 a new crime show came to fright people, which a copy of crime patrol was named as Savdhan India. After its one session it back with a new name Savdhan India (Fight's Back) which is also gain a good TRP.

Reality TV is a catch all category which includes all types of entertainment programs about real people. It is located under the territory of information and entertainment, drama and documentary (Hill 2005) .

When Indian Television Industry gets expertise in re-enactments of real crime stories the regional channels of States also started to copy their styles such as Dastan-E-Jurm. Dastan-E-Jurm is a prime time program of Etv regional Channels which is telecast on Etv Rajasthan, EtvMadhaya Pradesh, Etv Uttar Pradesh, Etv Bihar, Etv Urdu and recently it started on IBN7 also. Basically it is a news program but copy the style of crime shows and its one segment is based on re-enactment of crime story. It used a very novelistic style of presentation with horrible sound effects and diegesis.

These shows represent and re-enacts some real crime stories which takes place in our society with the help of professional actors and realistic approach. The cases like dowry deaths, acid attack, theft, jealousy, extra marital affair, trafficking, drugs, alcoholism, family feuds, property inheritance, eve teasing and crime against girls etc. What we've read in our newspaper is there. The incidents are inspired from newspaper reports, reconstructed and presented in a story format for getting the audience for the channel. These programs presenting the realities in an entertaining way that draws upon the traditions of tabloid

journalism and crime fictions and they are not considered as News (Fishman and Cavendor 1998).

This research will examine the effects of reality crime shows such as **Crime Patrol** and **Savdhan India (Fights Back)**and the effect of **Crime reporting** and **representation of crime** in **News Channels**. These shows are very popular in Indian television and telecast on the family channels at the prime time, and getting high TRPs. They are hosted by prominent faces of television industry like SakshiTanwar, AnupSoni, Sushant Singh, etc. Crime Patrol is dubbed in other Indian languages also because it gains a very huge popularity in 14 years.

Construction of paranoiac state (a stage of illusions)

Information about the incidents which takes place in our society and generating awareness in the society to prevent such happenings are basic elements of any media. The News channels and the real crime shows usually over dramatized the stories with punchy lines and strong sound and video effects to give them a horrible realistic touch to horrify the audience. Perhaps they are doing this for the awareness of viewers as they publicised with these watchwords like *satarkrahe, apradhkidastak, kahiaap k saathesanaho* etc. But these all kind of techniques gives the illustration to the viewer as the anchor is interacting with them and telling them to be safe and prepare for upcoming problems.

Many studies have proved that television viewers learn prosocial and antisocial attitudes and behaviour from television enactments (Comstock & Paik, 1991; Liebert, Sprafkin, & Davidson, 1982; Roberts &Bachen, 1981; Rubinstein, 1983). This affects the viewer's behaviour and shapes their opinions about crime and society. They usually overestimate the level of crime in their society. The long-time viewers developed a sense that every person existed outside their comfort zone is intended to harm them. The reality crime shows telecast their repeats on every free slot of channel. Sometimes they telecast continues three to four hours. The reruns of such programs can surely affect the human psyche because human mind believe the things which it saw again and again. The mimic of fictional style and sympathetic approach draws an illusionary world which constructs a paranoiac stage. Where the audience of these shows, makes an influenced perception about the society and it leads him to overestimate the occurrence of crime and criminals. It affects the psyche as well as social ties. This condition is called as paranoiac state.

Crime which creates predator and prey relationship is a factor which attracts the human mind which has proved in many studies from ancient time to present. Popularity of crime novels and folk tales are examples of liking the crime element. The representation and the narration impact the viewer's psyche and who watch more crime shows are more fearful and think that society is full of criminals. Studies has proven that over dramatization and crime re-enactments or over emphasis on crime reports increased crime rates instead of preventing crime (Mary Holland Baker et al.1983).

The Research Problem Statement

The over dramatized representations and regular repetitions and coverage of *Real Crime Stories* by the audio visual medium create horror \fear of crime in audience. The audience make perception about society according to these *Reality Crime Shows*and *crime news*. This takes society into an illustrational state that society is not worth for living (Kort Butler et. al 2011). It leads to social distrust where audience are always in fear of being attacked, raped, and killed by known or unknown persons.

The Indian Family Channels like Sony, Life ok, repeat only the lower budget shows on all free time slots. It results the daily three to four hour repetition of crime shows. These repetitions force the audience to cultivate the information accordingly. It constructs misconceptions in viewers in which they believe that society is totally irrupting in crime. Hence the *Reality Crime Shows*, from this point of view, stand as a problem in society. Therefore the reruns of crime shows should be stopped for healthier society.

Aim of research

The purpose of this Research is to explore the impact of reality crime shows and crime news on society. The reality crime shows and news aimed to bring awareness in society are unintentionally constructing a society which is creating fear and imprisonment in their mind. This is a situation which leads to social distrust. In this situation viewer trust the content of the show and make a perception about world that it is more dangerous than reality. This is similar to a paranoiac stage where person lives in illusionary condition and behave as they are real for them.

Objectives of research-

The objectives of the proposed work are -

1. to examine the media influence on audience perceptions towards crime and society ;
2. to examine the impact of reality crime shows and crime news on social context in construction of illusions ;
3. to know the audience thinking about crime occurrence in society and compare with real frequency of crime ;
4. to explore the hidden illusionary fear in influenced audience ;
5. to know that how these shows helps the society to maintain its social taboos;

Research Hypothesis

H1- Dramatization of real crime stories and their repetitions create an illusionary, unsafe, horror struck, repulsive society for their viewer, which leads to the condition of social distrust.

H2- These shows create misconceptions about crime and its frequency.

H3- These shows try to help in maintaining the social taboos in developing society.

Review of Literature

Reality Crime showsand its impact in the audience is the most debatable topic for four main disciplines to examining such as communication, sociology, psychology and criminology. The studies are continuously trying to reach some conclusion that why these *Reality Crimes Shows* becoming so popular and where they had started.

The crime shows has started from America and it is often called that it emerged as an American phenomenon. Americans interest towards 'Crime Scene Investigation' reached on that height which became an effect called as 'CSI effect' which is the one of most researching topic in America. When American society (so called educated and developed society) faced these psychological effects of crime shows than the Indian audience in semi- urban settings who are not well educated and developed in comparison to America, how they do not affected from crime shows.

Most of the researches show that who watch *Reality Crime Shows* are started indulging in crime and some of them are relate these results with the annual crime record also. On one extent it is right because people are bound to learn and learning theory, behavioural theories are the most prominent examples of this kind of effects.

This research is based on the further stage of effects, which is an assumption that viewing habits of violence leads its viewer to a paranoiac state which George Gerbner first suggested in his Cultural Indicator project. The purpose of the Cultural Indicators project was to identify the "cultivated" effects of television on viewers. They were concerned with the effects of violent programs of television on the attitudes and behaviors of the American public. He proposed a **cultivation analysis** where they examine the effects on viewers psyche.

To understand the impacts it is necessary to explain that how this new genre has developed in world wide.

Development of '*reality crime shows*': subgenre of reality tv

Hill (2005) in her book ***Reality TV: Audience and Popular Factual Television***, examines the viewing experience of reality TV and the attitudes and preferences of audience about issues such as privacy, accuracy, information and entertainment. According to her Reality TV are infotainments and converting into the hybrid format which is not exactly informational and not pure entertainment, developed within historically and culturally specific media environments.

Hartley (2001b) defines infotainment as a combination of Lifestyle, Reality TV, Tabloid news, Investigative journalism, Talk show and Animal series. The historical development of infotainment factual TV is multidimensional study. It has a growing body of literature that provides excellent analysis of crime reporting (Fishman and Cavendor 1998, Palmer 2003).

Hill argues that development of reality genre from infotainment- type format within a strong entertainment frame directly relate audience responses to traditional and contemporary reality programing. As Kilborn says: *The primary aim of much reality programming is 'that of diversion rather than enlightenment'; and although some makers of reality programmes argue that certain formats can provide social value, it is the case that the reality genre as a whole is designed for entertainment value.*

Kilborn's thought is criticised by Hill that audience find show entertaining does not mean that information is no longer important to them. She further explained that audience critically watch the reality tv and make their analysis. Her critical viewing of audience connects to the concept of critical viewing as social action by Livingstone and Lunt (1994)

'There is something fundamentally social about being critical viewer: different interpretive strategies are always expressed in a social situation…..social desirability works to supports critical comments as clever, impressive self –presentation …..Peoples critical judgements draw on social knowledge and through their responses to television, people generate social identities for themselves and others.'(90-1)

Hill concluded that Reality TV crime shows emerged as a marketization policy because of the informative and entertainment elements of this genre. The examination of viewers that they relate themselves with the presentation of real people in television is further related to many

social, psychological, criminological researches. The behavioural and attitude pattern are always effected by such representations has already proved. Hill's contribution is very important in understanding the reality shows and audience relationship. It helps me in my research about the development of reality crime shows in the marketization process and the indulgence of audience needs for information and curiosity about happening.

This research aims at exploring the view of Indian audience towards reality crime shows that whether audience takes reality TV as real or fictions. The generation of social identities for self and others were not clearly explained in her research in context to liking and relating with the characters of the stories of these shows.

Curry (2001) examines the reactions of audience about reality in her research article. Her study is based on the relationship between the reality television program COPSand the social viewers reaction to show. She noted in her article that *"By rolling news, drama, and documentary styles into one low cost wave with high ratings, reality-programming takes the traumas of life, captured live on film or dramatically re-enacted, and turns them into prime time television series. On a continuum from America's Funniest Home Videos to America's Most Wanted, reality programming gives its audience a glimpse of some of society's most laughable members as well as some of its most lethal."*

She argues that most reality television research has focused on the social dimensions portrayed in TV, rather than the societal reactions provoked by reality crime programs. The research on the social interests that reality television viewers bring to the set perceptions has to be explored. Curry's chosen samples from her university, in which maximum were justice studies students. She found that viewers are considered these shows as meaningful attraction factor because they identify that the society which is shown in television is distinct from them. She suggested that to examine social reaction of reality TV, researcher should choose a social setting for getting clear conclusions about viewer's reactions.

Hill and Curry, have different perspective in developing the reality crime shows. One is reflection second is distinction between representing societies and real societies. If we see in Indian context there is a culture of internalizing media images and representations. The Indian audience believed that whatever television represents to them is based on reality. What impact it put on audience mind is examined by thousands of researchers from 1980 to now.

The effect and appealed of reality TV is examined by researchers of communication such as Nabi et al (2003, 2006), Stott (2011) etc.

Cultivation Theory: A Theoretical Perspective

The cultivation theory is a very prominent and most popular approach in the media effect theories. According to the theory heavy viewing of television generates a world of ideas and mental thoughts which shape the perception about real through 'reality' which produced by the television entertainment channels. It leads audience to constructs misperception of real world.

Cultivation theory developed by George Gerbner and Larry Gross in their large scale research project entitled Cultural Indicator project. Cultural Indicator project was aimed to measure the cultivated effect of television viewers. Gerbner found that there are three main components suffered from heavy or continued television viewer. First is 'Mean' where audience mind is shrink to the knowledge which they consumed from television. It affects their social ties and social relationships. These kinds of viewers see the 'world' (the second component), as it is represented in television. Audience trust the television content whether they agreed or not. Last component is a Syndrome where programming reinforces the worst fears and apprehensions into the viewers. Gerbner called it as 'The mean world syndrome'.
This study has developed during 1980's when the television entertainment industry has taken a move with globalization and marketization of entertainment content. The crime was very prominent component for measuring the television impact. This was a time of raising the reality crime shows in USA and UK.

Cultivation theory is emerged to cultivate the impact of television violence. **Spark and Sarapin (2009)** conducted a research onthe relationship between exposure to TV Crime Dramas and perceptions of the Criminal Justice System. They concluded that exposure to TV crime programs always associated with overestimation the frequency of crime and misperceive important facts and distorted the facts about criminal justice system.

As Sarapin quoted "*Many people die as a result of being murdered in these types of shows, and we found the heavy TV-crime viewers estimated two and a half times more real-world*

deaths due to murder than non-viewers. People's perceptions also were distorted in regards to a number of other serious crimes. Heavy TV-crime viewers consistently overestimated the frequency of crime in the real world."

This research focus on how attitudes and beliefs formed by watching crime shows about crimes and criminal justice process and the reception of viewers. According to Spark it is very important to understand that how these crime shows influence the viewer's opinion and perceptions in general.

Spark noted that "*this kind of television viewing can lead to 'Mean World Syndrome' where people start to think about the world as a scary place*".

These crime shows constructs a paranoiac society where people beliefs that society is much more dangerous in comparison to reality. They overestimate the violence and victimization in society in comparison to their neighbours who watch less television. It creates paranoia (syndrome) for its viewer which brings them into an illusionary world. That is not real but publicised as reality of society, which creates social distrust in society.

Cultivation theory has several assumptions which examine the televisions role and importance in our life as well as its impacts. First assumption is that it has power to shape our society to relate with real world. Same if applied in context to Indian crime shows, it has used a way of narrating a story which gives a message to learn and understand the circumstances. Human being learned through the stories with certain people whom they trust. Television does the same thing for its audience; it narrates the stories for its audience with sympathetic and emotional approach.

According to Gerbner et al (1986), television's major function is to stabilize the cultural social patterns and cultural resistance to change. Second assumption says that television is most impactful form of media. Gerbner et al (1986) argues that television is more powerful to influence social trends and individuals perceptions. Its repetitive function and common contents forms the whole society in common symbolic environment. Many studies have proved that this theory is best suitable to examine the effect of all kind of impacts.

Cultivation theory emerged to examine the American violence culture but now it has applied all over the world in communication, psychology, criminology and sociology fields because of its trust worthy conclusions.

Research Methodology

Research Design: Exploratory Design

Exploratory research is used in a preliminary stage when the topic or issue is new and data is difficult to collect. Exploratory research can address all types research questions (what, why, how). The results of exploratory research are not usually useful for decision-making by themselves, but they can provide significant insight into a given situation.

Universe of the study

The semi urban and urban settings.

Sampling method and size-

Total 500 samples will be collected in the entire populations through snowball sampling method as a representative of total sampling from the age group of 12 to 85.

Tools of Data Collection

Quantitative research tools will be used to getting the results from respondents. The well-structured questionnaire will be given to the respondents to fill the answers of questions. The questionnaire will be given to 500 people, who are watching these shows regularly or the viewers who stopped watching these programs because they found them fearful. The purpose of this research is to check the level of fear created by shows in audience towards society.

Personal Interview of Psychologists, Police officers and some of the victims of represented stories and production team.

Research questions

The objectives help to frame research questions which precede the research further. On the basis of hypothesis and objectives the following research questions are proposed:

RQ 1.Does audience trust on the reality of reality TV crime shows or news crime shows?

This question helps to examine that the viewers of reality crime shows considered them as real or fiction. They found them real and factual representation or biased and overdramatized. Audience perception towards crime shows is a key to examine the influence of these shows on their perceptions that they are trying to aware them or just engage in profit making process.

RQ 2.Which one impacted most on the audience awareness or fear to be victimized?

This research question is framed to answer that audience being aware from these shows or they generate a kind of fear in the audience. The fear, that they can be trapped, raped, killed, fraud, theft and stereotypical notions about certain cases like honour killing or failure of love marriages. This question can measure that what is the need to be aware through the reality crime shows or crime shows which shows the lethal crime reporting.

RQ 3.Are viewers thinks that our society is completely irrupt in crime and criminals?

This question is framed to know the thinking of audience about society and the crime occurrence level in society. The heavy viewers always misinterpret the level of crime as Gerbner's cultivation analysis has already proven. If the audience respond in positively than it can easily measure that they over trust on shows and mistrust on social reality. They make a perception that society is not worth living and you can never trust on anyone.

RQ 4.Are the Crimes story represented by shows specifically target any category (e.g.women, youth, poor, religious)?

Crime stories has a pre-set formula to show certain kind of crime stories which has the attraction power to attracts the audience more. For example the crime against women and old by youth, love marriages failures, after marriage deaths, extramarital affairs etc to force the already existed values on societal norms. This reinforces these conservative values which again affects viewers and generates that if they had done something like that than it is

possible that they will be victimized. These kinds of representations always reinforce such stereotypical, conservative and patriarchal forces to shape and control the societal norms.

RQ 5. Does the repetition of these shows are choice of audience or they have become habitual to watch because they consume all possible free slots in channels?

The answer of this question will remove the entire possible cross questions that viewers watch reality crime shows to full fill their needs and they watch their reruns for the same reason or the marketization policy makes the audience force to see what they want not the audience choice.

RQ 6. How it affects the human psyche and developed an unsafe attitude towards society?

To get the answer I'll take interviews of psychiatrists. It will help in research to analyse and cross examining the research problem.

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